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No. 1

An die Abonnenten der "Caecilia."

Ein recht segensreiches neues Jahr wünsche ich von Herzen allen Lesern der "Caecilia." Mören dieselben der Zeitschrift treu bleiben und recht bald die \$2.00 pro 1919 einsenden, damit die Zusendung regelmässig erfolgen kann. Etwaige Adressveränderung bitte immer rechtzeitig und genau anzugeben. Wenn ich trotz der höheren Preise von Material und Arbeit den Preis der "Caecilia" nicht erhöhe, so hoffe ich, dass die Leser wo möglich neue Abonnenten zu gewinnen suchen, um der Redaktion damit die Opfer an Zeit und Geld wenigstens etwas zu erleichtern.

J. Singenberger.

Dr. F. X. Witt on Gregorian Chant.

Thoughts Culled from His Writings of 50 Years Ago and Translated by
Albert Lohmann.

I hold the opinion that the Chant which came into existence during the first seven centuries of the Christian Era, if measured by its own standard, is as much a perfect work of art in its class as are Beethoven's symphonies and Mozart's *Don Juan* in their class. It is altogether wrong and at variance with historical facts to think that, because a species of art dates back to antiquity, it necessarily is primitive in the sense that its products must be inferior and therefore negligible. Homer is one of the most ancient poets of whom we have any knowledge. I consider him in no respect inferior to Goethe. Homer's works are the grandest and sublimest fruition of an epoch of art as distinct and complete in itself as was that of Goethe. So, too, the Gregorian Chant is a representative expression and the grandest product of that epoch of art when melodies were invented with no thought as to their accompaniment or harmonization. Gregorian Chant is an imperishable and, of its kind, the unequalled masterpiece of natural musical declamation.

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Let me set to rights this very much misunderstood talk about progress: We have made

great progress in modern times on the technical side of architecture, thanks to better mechanical appliances, etc.; yet we are far behind ancient and medieval times in point of ideal conception and invention, so much so in fact, that our most gifted architects are really only imitators and eclectics. So also in music we have advanced as regards instrumentation, but in other respects, for example, in choral composition, we have rather gone back. To try to set up a comparison between figured, harmonic music and Gregorian Chant is a foolish and futile undertaking, because a basis of comparison is lacking. The fundamental principles of the Chant are: the absence of harmony and measure; melodic formation within the limits of the diatonic modes. The principles governing figured music are: harmony, measure, and the necessity of the dièses for the formation of authentic cadences. Could things be more diametrically opposite? Hence, to say that modern music is better, more perfect, more progressive, better sounding, more melodious than Gregorian Chant: or to say that the people have long ago done with this Chant and have no longer any understanding or feeling for it; that "it is sheer folly to believe they can ever be won over to it"; that our people have no feeling or appreciation except for modern music—all this and all of a similar strain is but beating the air with glib phrases. Gregorian Chant and figured music must be judged according to entirely different principles and standards; in other words, they admit of no comparison.

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If we look to effects—by effects we commonly measure the greatness and importance of causes—we shall have to say that *Fidelio*, the 5th and 9th symphonies, *Don Juan* etc. will never produce a greater impression or elicit more enthusiasm than did the choruses in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles. All that Riehl tells us of the effect produced by Bellini's operas, and all we read about the enthusiasm for *Freischuetz* and all such reports in papers of our day as, for example, the one about a certain singer's appearance in Lisbon at which 190 doves were set free in the theater while the artist was recalled to the foot-lights thirty times amid a shower of 200 bouquets—what is all that compared with the effect of music among the highly-cultured Greeks?

And so, too, the Chant of the Church produced on St. Augustine an impression such as can come only from music possessing the highest endowments of genius. It will not do to say that the Greeks and St. Augustine simply were not accustomed to anything better in music. True, the music to which they were accustomed was different from our own; yet it must have been music of an inspired and perfect kind. It matters not what the period of time, a highly cultured mind can be affected as they were, only by what is truly sublime and artistic.

* * *

What, then, is the criterion for forming a true estimate of the worth of Gregorian Chant? One could and ought to show that the Chant fulfills its liturgical purpose as nothing else could; but that would lead us too far, since we should have to examine the Chant in its relation to all the parts of the Church Service. As a preliminary reflection, let me say that the worth of the Chant, in its liturgical aspect, is absolute; it could not be greater. This does not mean that the Liturgy stands or falls by the Chant, but it does mean that the Chant is the most perfect, because the most adequate, music for the Liturgy. Both—the Liturgy and the Chant—are of one cast; both are the product of one and the same spirit, that higher, specifically ecclesiastical spirit in the strictest sense of the word. . . . Both date back to the same period of time: to the time when the churchly spirit was penetrated to its very depths by the authors of the Chant, and when they in turn were permeated by this churchly spirit: to the time which, closely following upon the Apostolic days of direct divine inspiration, was still actuated by the spirit of the Apostles.

Such as are not familiar with the Gregorian Chant question, I refer to my brochure "*der Zustand der katholischen Kirchenmusik*" and request them most earnestly to read pages 15-26; that will save me the need of repeating here. By way of supplement, I add the following:

1) Since the Catholic Service is intended for people of every clime, every plane of education, every age and nation, etc., Church music must needs be of the utmost simplicity and naturalness.

Gregorian Chant is based upon the simplest and most natural system—it is nature and simplicity itself; for it has developed from but seven tones, the simplest and most natural of scales. The very absence of harmony, no less than the avoidance of wide intervals such as the sixth and seventh, makes the Gregorian melody easier to grasp, as we could show by

innumerable instances of our personal experience.

2) Since the Catholic Service has for one of its objects the tempering and quieting of human passions and is meant to be a holy repose in devotion and God Himself, it follows that Church music should be passionless, devotional, pure, and chaste.

The Chant is of that nature by its very system, for it avoids everything chromatic.

3) Since the Catholic Service is primarily directed to the glorification of God, Church music ought to be characterized in a surpassing degree by solemnity and sublimity.

The Chant measures up to this requirement even by its system alone. For is it not a well-known principle of aesthetics that the sublime is generally, if not indeed always, produced by the simple, and this not in any way to the exclusion of the highest possibilities of art? Beethoven's 5th symphony I consider the most sublime of all and, the Scherzo excepted, also the simplest in structure.

4) Though the Catholic Service contains much that readily appeals to the senses, it is nevertheless replete with deep mysteries.

With all its simplicity, the Gregorian Chant possesses depth, depth of conception, as the most learned researches are proving to us. And so it must be with everything that has been fashioned strictly according to a logical system and has been developed to its utmost consequences and finished to the very last detail, as have been, for example, our finest Gothic cathedrals, to which the Chant in many ways bears a resemblance.

5) The Catholic Service, with all its exterior pomp, is ideal and spiritual—it is a real adoration "in spirit and in truth."

Given a good execution, the Gregorian Chant is a thing of pomp and power; but its pomp and power come not from the use of external means (of which the Chant has altogether too few at its disposal to achieve such an effect), but from its soul, its spirituality. Listening to the Chant, one is affected by it as by some strange influence, as by something compelling reverence, as by something pure and chaste and, withall, mild and tender. This effect can be attributed to but one cause—the spirituality, the ideal truth of the Chant.

6) In the Catholic Service there is unity; but there is also abundant variety.

So also in the Chant, whose simple scale is made to serve in the formation of such a variety of cadences (modes), that a greater wealth of tonal possibilities is not conceivable within the range of the diatonic system. Whereas the modern keys have but two fundamental scales (major and minor) and are restricted to the

tonal relations of these two, the Chant locates its semitones, in relation to the Tonic or final, differently in each of its modes. . . . By comparison, the modern tonal system appears a distinct retrogression. If one should interpose that, for all that, the Chant is at a disadvantage since it lacks the chromatic, I would reply that the composers of the Chant were well acquainted with the chromatic though they refrained from employing it, because it did not serve their purpose. The fact that Beethoven does not run the whole gamut of tonalities or enharmonic changes in every composition, argues no shortcoming, surely; Beethoven simply wrote as suited his purpose.

7) The Catholic Service welcomes the contribution of the arts.

The Chant is a finished work of art by its correct declamation, its appropriate expression of the lyric, the epic, and the dramatic etc. The Vespers, the Litanies, the Kyriale, the Graduale, the Antiphons—all receive a distinct and characteristic treatment. I shall demonstrate this at length on another occasion.

8) The Catholic Service has its ceremonial adapted to every requirement: there is in it grief, joy and hope; love, sorrow, and penance—all admirably, marvelously combined and interwoven. If any one thing stands out more than another, the prominence is always of a subdued, never of a glaring kind: never is there sorrow without its consolation; never the bitterness of tears and remorse without the sweetening of hope and comfort; never grief without any joy whatsoever, that is to say, there is never any despair; never is there anything violent or impetuous—no, all is sweet without sentimentality, strong and vigorous without rigor, all is holy and divine.

So, too, is the Chant.

8) The Catholic Service is full of life; nothing in it is soulless or lumbering, nothing, distorted or insipid.

The same holds true of the Gregorian Chant, and this because it is not fettered in its movement by measure and harmony. As a result, the Chant is capable of greater expression: the singer is freer to communicate his innermost soul in pure melody; he may even quite freely, and without conflicting with the Gregorian system, employ the *tempo rubato*, which the moderns consider an indispensable requisite for the complete outpouring of a soul wrought up to the highest pitch of enthusiasm. For, while the Gregorian melody may have notes of different value, its execution is not dependent on an accompaniment. And though the harmony be something grand in itself, and though to melody it be a great boon, yet melody is the

more sublime, the more soulful and inward, just when it is melody free and unhampered. This freedom outweighs nearly all the advantages of an added harmony.

Practical Suggestions for the Singing Lesson.

(Concluded.)

II.

Defective practice,—the cause of incorrect singing.

We can only do what we have learned to do. How can pupils be expected to sing clearly and in tune without having been guided and directed thereto in a reasonable manner? The number of children naturally endowed with a clear voice is very small. Every talent and disposition is naturally one-sided and limited; and this one-sidedness and limitation is the very point from which the improvement must be commenced. A judicious teacher will not be satisfied with merely "singing through" the hymns for Sundays and festivals, for, if he would, a kind of slovenliness will pervade the work of the teacher as well as of the pupils. Apart from the regular rehearsals for Divine Service a so-called elementary course of instructions must be arranged. As comprehensive as this task may appear at first glance, it is, after all, not so discouraging. Excellent results may be expected, provided the beginning is made in the primary grades, continued in the intermediate, and reviewed and enlarged in the high school. These exercises would include scales, intervals, chords, crescendo and diminuendo, exercises in diction, etc. The universal methodical principle to proceed from the easy to the more difficult is to be well observed, or else the otherwise dry, uninteresting material will soon become tiresome to the pupils, and a veritable burden to the teacher. Exercises as suggested by any of the standard text-books might be written on the blackboard, at first in a slow tempo, and in various pitches, with different vowels. The teacher might assist with his violin. Increasing and diminishing requires more time and practice, and should be reserved for the higher classes. At first the tone should gradually be sung louder, but always "moderato," never to the greatest degree of loudness. As examples for practice the teacher should choose the long tones which occur in the songs. In this manner the exercise will not only gain in attractiveness for the children, but it will likewise find a practical application. With regard to exercises of this nature, P. Piel says:

"It is altogether impossible to imagine that children accustomed to the crescendo should lower the pitch. It has a physical reason,

which the following statements will demonstrate. When a current of air, applied to the vocal cords of a dissected larynx, was gradually strengthened, the number of vibrations became greater, and, in consequence, the tone became higher. We see from this that, during a crescendo, the vocal cords have a tendency to make a greater number of vibrations; accordingly, while increasing, the tone would always become higher. The preventing of this evil condition is effected by the ear, which determines the pitch, and, with lightning rapidity, affects the nerves, and through these the muscles which regulate the cartilages and cords of the larynx. With a crescendo there is a looser tension of the vocal cords to insure uniformity of tone. If this were not the case, we could not increase the loudness without, at the same time, singing higher. By reason of the fact that with a crescendo there is always a tendency to raise the voice, it follows that this must be an excellent means of preventing the voice from sinking, and it partly explains the fact that the voice of children, accustomed to the crescendo, frequently raise the pitch while singing."

III.

An incorrect mode of breathing,—another cause of "flat" singing.

A widely spread, evil custom among singers is, not to take breath until a certain pressure in the vocal cords compels them to do so. That a tone produced under such conditions should not appear clear and true is easily explained. Gradually withdraw the wind from an organ-pipe, and the tone will have a miserable end. The teacher should strenuously insist upon breathing at the proper places, and not allow the pupils to breathe whenever and wherever they please; this should be done by all the pupils at the same time.

a. Breathing—with reference to the chant.

Dom Pothier expresses himself in this regard in the following terms: "Breathing is necessary at the end of a phrase and after a lengthy neum; it is allowed within a neum in places where it will not break up a melodic figure, but it is not permitted before a new syllable of a word. It is to be understood, as a matter of fact, that when breath is taken in the middle of the text, it may in no way disturb the free movement of the recitation. Ingeniously applied, and, as it were, stolen, these pauses for breathing assist to refresh the memory, while, on the other hand, if no interruption whatever is made, indistinct and confused ideas are left in the mind. Undue haste, as well as slowness, should be avoided. Precipitation obliterates the divisions, and causes the comprehension of the text to become more diffi-

cult, while, at the same time, it mutilates the text. Slowness, on the contrary, impresses one with the idea that the singer must first feel for his tones, it is tedious, and monopolizes time unnecessarily. By breathing too frequently, the idea is hackneyed; by waiting too long there is danger of being in an emergency for breath. Contrary to the usual rule never to separate the syllables of a word by breathing, instances occur in which, on account of the execution of an elaborate neum, a separation of the word becomes necessary. As examples may be mentioned the 'Ite Missa est' of the Mass 'In Festis Solemnibus' (Kyriale Romanum, pp. 10 and 11), and the 'Alleluja' of the Mass 'de Sabbato Sancto,' where, in both cases, a division of the word becomes an absolute necessity. Here, according to the teaching of Elias Samson, a distinguished master of choral singing of the 13th century, we may cite the rule: Within a word breath may never be taken immediately before a new syllable.' In syllabic chants, that is, those having one tone of the melody for each syllable, the phrasing of the melodic members should agree with the text throughout. Breath may be taken at marks of punctuation, and after words belonging together."

b. Breathing — with reference to figured music.

Here, likewise, the meaning of the text must always be taken into consideration. It follows therefrom that words and groups of words belonging together are to be sung in one breath. The peculiar forms of rhythm occurring in figured music require special attention, which we will now consider. Quite frequently long sustained tones, syncopations, similarly constructed figures, etc., are to be sung, in which a correct and artistic rendering will require frequent breathing, so that the above-mentioned rule, not to breathe before a new syllable, cannot be followed. The following rules may be applied in nearly all instances. Besides breathing at punctuation marks and rests, breath may be taken—

1. Before long words and words belonging together.
2. Before long notes and syncopations.
3. Before similarly constructed melodic figures and themes, and those belonging together.
4. Between two tones upon the same degree which are to be sung to the same syllable.

If the director wisely conducts his instructions in singing in this manner, he may be assured that the voices of the singers will always be clear and true, and the performances of his choir will be artistically correct, devout and edifying.—From the German of P.

A. M. D. G.

